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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5972

[REDACTED] SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 4301

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, AR
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO CORDOBA AND TUCUMAN

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(☒) Release (☐) Excise (☐) Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: (☐) In Part (☒) In Full

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Date Declassify on Re

1. CORDOBA AND TUCUMAN, ARGENTINE CITIES CLOSELY IDENTIFIED
WITH PAST TERRORIST ACTIVITIES, WERE VISITED BY AMBASSADOR
AND STAFF MEMBERS MAY 31-JUNE 2.

2. INASMUCH AS CORDOBA WAS ONE OF CITIES HOSTING WORLD
CUP (SOCCER) GAMES AND LARGE NUMBERS OF FOREIGN PRESS WOULD
BE VISITING THAT CITY, IT WAS FELT USEFUL TO FEEL PULSE OF
COMMUNITY AND REOPEN CONTACT WITH A MAJOR ARGENTINE CITY.

3. ON ARRIVAL AT CORDOBA THE US ENTOURAGE WAS MET BY
BRIGADIER ROMERO, AF BASE COMMANDER AND MEMBERS OF HIS COMMAND.
TROOPS WERE REVIEWED BY THE AMBASSADOR WHO THEN VISITED WITH
THE BASE COMMANDER IN HIS OFFICE. THERE WAS NO INDICATION
OF ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT NOR WAS THERE ANY HINT OF
ANNOYANCE WITH USG.

4. THE NEXT CALL WAS MADE ON GENERAL MENENDEZ, COMMANDER
OF 3RD ARMY CORPS. AGAIN, TROOPS WERE LINED UP IN FRONT
OF GARRISON AND TRADITIONAL SALUTE ACCORDED AMBASSADOR AND
STAFF. THE AMBASSADOR HAS NEVER MET MENENDEZ, A REPUTED
HARD-LINER AND ONE OF VIDELA'S NEMESSES. WE HAD REPORTS,
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UNCONFIRMED, THAT ADMIRAL MASSERA AND MENENDEZ WERE FORMING
A COALITION AGAINST VIDELA AND TO PREVENT GENERAL VIOLA

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FROM BECOMING A JUNTA MEMBER. SUPPOSEDLY, MENENDEZ' AMBITION IS TO BECOME ARMY COMMANDER. AN ATTRACTIVE PAINTING OF THE TRAINING SHIP "LIBERTAD" WAS PROMINENTLY DISPLAYED. US STAFFERS ATTRIBUTED THE NAVY PAINTING TO MASSERA'S POLITICAL EFFORTS.

5. INASMUCH AS MENENDEZ' REPUTATION OF A "TOUGH GUY" PRECEDED HIM, THERE WAS SOME EXPECTATION OF FIREWORKS AND PERHAPS VITRIOLIC DIATRIBE AGAINST THE USG. HOWEVER, M MENENDEZ RETAINED A FRIENDLY POSITION THROUGHOUT. HE TACTFULLY AVOIDED ANY CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS. THIS IMPORTANT VISIT WENT WELL.

6. NEXT ON THE AGENDA WAS COLONEL ROMANUTTI, CORDOBA'S MAYOR. HE WAS THE ONLY ONE TO TAKE A SOMEWHAT NEGATIVE APPROACH. HE WENT INTO THE SONG AND DANCE OF THE "DIRTY WAR". ONCE HE CLEANSED HIS SOUL, HE MADE FRIENDLY OVERTURES. HE PROCLAIMED THE AMBASSADOR AN HONORED GUEST OF CORDOBA AND GAVE HIM A KEY TO THE CITY.

7. THE ONLY DISCORDANT NOTE OF THE VISIT WAS STRUCK AT MAYOR'S OFFICE. A TV COMMENTATOR INSISTED ON INTERVIEWING THE AMBASSADOR. THE MAY AND AMBASSADOR AGREED IN ADVANCE THAT NO POLITICAL QUESTIONS WOULD BE CONSIDERED. AFTER PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS, REPORTER ASKED ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS. THE AMBASSADOR REMINDED REPORTER THAT THIS WAS A POLITICAL QUESTION. THE AMBASSADOR ADDED HE HAD BEEN DISCUSSING HUMAN RIGHTS DURING THE SEVEN MONTHS HE HAD BEEN IN ARGENTINA AND HIS STAND WAS WELL KNOWN. AMBASSADOR CONCLUDED BY STATING IT WOULD SERVE NO PURPOSE AT THIS POINT TO AGAIN REPEAT HIS VIEWS.

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8. UNFORTUNATELY, THE AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS WERE TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT BY THEMEDIA. THE REPORTED LOCALLY THAT AMBASSADOR HAD SAID HUMAN RIGHTS WAS A SUBJECT THAT HAD BEEN REHASHED MANY TIMES, THEREFORE, IT WAS NOT WORTHY OF FURTHER CONSIDERATION.

9. THE PROVINCIAL SUPREME COURT WAS NEXT ON THE AGENDA. THE AMBASSADOR VISITED WITH FIVE OF THE SUPREME COURT JUDGES, WHO WERE PLEASED TO LEARN THAT THE AMBASSADOR WAS A FORMER SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE AND PROSECUTOR. THE AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN OVER LACK OF REDRESS (LEGAL REMEDY) FOR PRISONERS HELD UNDER PEN (PODER EJECUTIVE NACIONAL). THIS IMMEDIATELY

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PLACED JUDGES ON THE DEFENSIVE AND IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT THE QUESTION WAS NOT WELCOME. THEY WENT INTO A PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION OF PEN BEING AN EXTRAORDINARY REMEDY SUPPORTED BY THE CONSTITUTION.

10. AMBASSADOR ASSERTED THAT HIS RESEARCH INDICATED THAT HABEAS CORPUS, LEY DE AMPARO AND THE UNCONSTITUTIONALITY ISSUES WERE NOT AVAILABLE REMEDIES FOR ANYONE INCARCERATED UNDER PEN, THEREFORE, PRISONERS COULD REMAIN JAILED INDEFINITELY. THE FACT THAT PRISONERS HAD NO LEGAL RECOURSE WAS A MATTER THAT SERIOUSLY CONCERNED THE USG. JUDGES DIDN'T HAVE AN ANSWER TO THAT EXCEPT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE ONLY RELIEF WAS THE RIGHT OF OPTION, BUT THIS OPTION WAS NARROWLY CONSTRUED AND APPLIED BY GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES. THEIR ONLY SOLUTION WAS THAT IMPRISONMENT COULD LAST UNTIL THE TERMINATION OF STATE OF SIEGE. THEY WERE REMINDED THIS COULD BE FOREVER.

11. AS THE EMBASSY GROUP LEFT THE SUPREME COURT, A COURT EMPLOYEE, SARCASTICALLY, SAID SUPREME COURT'S ONLY ACHIEVEMENT WAS THAT PRESIDING JUDGE PERMITTED A FRUIT STAND TO OPERATE IN LOBBY. DURING A RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE CENTER, ONE OF THE STUDENTS, A HOUSEWIFE, ASKED THE AMBASSADOR TO

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INTERCEDE WITH GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES ON BEHALF OF HER SON, A 20 YEAR-OLD YOUTH NAMED JOSE OSCAR AKSELRAD WHO WAS TAKEN FROM HIS HOME BY TROOPS ON MARCH 26, 1976 AND NOT HEARD FROM SINCE. WE WILL PRESENT HIS NAME TO THE FOWG BUT HAVE LITTLE HOPE.

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12. REST OF DAY WAS DEVOTED TO VISITING WITH CARDINAL (ARCHBISHOP) PRIMATESTA AND THE BINATIONAL CENTER. THE CARDINAL GAVE THE IMPRESSION HE WAS NOT ABOUT TO ROCK THE BOAT. HIS CONSERVATISM STOOD OUT. THE BINATIONAL CENTER EXUDED STRONG PRO-AMERICANISM ALL DOWN THE LINE.

13. ON THURSDAY, JUNE 1, A COURTESY VISIT WAS MADE TO GOVERNOR (BRIGADIER) BERNARDO CHASSEING, WHO MET THE AMBASSADOR AT THE FRONT DOOR OF THE GOVERNMENTAL PALACE WITH THE USUAL REVIEW OF THE TROOPS. HE WAS CORDIAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL. HE GAVE A DISSERTATION ON MORALS, FAMILY LIFE AND RELIGION. FOR A MOMENT, WE FELT IT WAS THE CARDINAL SPEAKING AND NOT THE GOVERNOR.

14. THE FINALE IN CORDOBA WAS A VISIT TO ARGENTINA'S PRIDE AND JOY--THE PUCARA AIRPLANE FACTORY. THE PUCARASIS A TWIN-ENGINE, TWO-SEATER PROP AIRCRAFT, HIGH MANEUVERABILITY AND SHORT TAKE-OFF AND LANDING CHARACTERISTICS. THE AMBASSADOR FLEW IN THE PURCARA. BRIGADIER RODRIGUEZ, PLANT DIRECTOR, HOSTED A LUNCH FOR EMBASSY GROUP.

15. EMBASSY GROUP ARRIVED IN TUCUMAN ABOUT 16:30 AND MET BY COLONEL BALLOFET, MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT, REPRESENTING GOVERNOR AND MAYOR OSCAR PAZ. THE GROUP WENT DIRECTLY TO GOVERNOR'S (GEN. MONTIEL FORZANO) OFFICE. HE HAD ONLY BEEN

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IN OFFICE SIX MONTHS AND SAID HE WAS JUST GETTING HIS FEET ON THE GROUND. AMBASSADOR HAS PREVIOUSLY KNOWN THE GOVERNOR, SO IT WAS A BRIEF PROTOCOL VISIT.

16. CALLS WERE THEN MADE ON ARCHBISHOP, MAYOR, COL. LLAMAS (REPRESENTING GENERAL MARTELLA), THE BI-NATIONAL CENTER AND THE SUPREME COURT. VISITS WERE ROUTINE AND AMERICAN GROUP WAS WELL RECEIVED. AMBASSADOR AGAIN MADE KNOWN TO SUPREME COURT JUDGES THE USG CONCERN OVER LACK OF LEGAL REDRESS FOR MEMBERS SERVING UNDER PEN. THE AMBASSADOR'S QUESTION AGAIN PROVED TO BE SENSITIVE. LOTS OF RHETORIC FLOWED OVER PEN BEING A CONSTITUTIONAL CONCEPT. IT READILY BECAME APPARENT THAT THE JUDGES WERE A RUBBER

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MAT FOR THE AMBASSADOR'S ESCORT, COL. BALLOFET, WHOSE RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE THE JUSTICE PORTFOLIO IN THE TUCUMAN PROVINCE. BALLOFET DOMINATED THE CONVERSATION. JUDGES WERE PREVENTED FROM TALKING BY CONSTANT INTERRUPTIONS ON PART OF BALLOFET. HE ALSO REMINDED THE AMBASSADOR HE WAS THE DIRECTOR OF ALL PRISONS.

17. IT BECAME APPARENT THE TUCUMAN SUPREME COURT IS A NON-ENTITY. BALLOFET PROVED TO BE THEIR CONSCIENCE.

18. AT A BREAKFAST MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF VARIOUS CHAMBERS F COMMERCE, THE BUSINESS LEADERS STRESSED HOW COLOSE TUCUMAN HAD COME TO EXPERIENCING A COMMUNIST TAKEOVER, BUT THAT COMPLETE PEACE AND TRANQUILITY HAD NOW BEEN RESTORED. THEY ALSO ASKED FOR AN INCREASE IN THE US SUGAR QUOTA FOR ARGENTINA, EXPRESSING THEIR DISMAY AT HAVING BEEN INFORMED DURING A RECENT VISIT TO WASHINGTON THAT THE ARGENTINE'S HAVE BEEN RESTRICTED BECAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS.

19. AS A GUEST OF GENERAL MARTELLA, EMBASSY GROUP FLEW
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IN A HELICOPTER OVER OPERATIONAL ZONE. A VISIT WAS MADE TO A SMALL VILLAGE DEVELOPED BY GOA IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OPERATIONAL ZONE AS A "DIKE" AGAINST FURTHER REBOUTS OF SUBVERSION. LATER ON EVERYONE HIKED IN THE JUNGLE TO SURVEY TERRITORY IN WHICH TERRORISTS OPERATED. AN INTERESTING VISIT WAS HAD WITH YOUNG SOLDIERS STATIONED IN THE OPERATIONAL ZONE.
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